

Holding Hands

Lately, my life seems to resemble the lines in a country western song. The dog was skunked. I'm furloughed without pay. The car broke down, and was towed away. The kids are fighting. My hair is turning grey.

I am all kinds of proud of my children. They work hard and apply themselves in school and each holds a job as well as spends some time volunteering. They are so much more than I was at their age. Like everyone else, they're not perfect, but I have felt that they are caring people and try hard. It's been said of them that they will be good citizens. Each is becoming a remarkable young woman, in her own way.

But lately, the sisters have been fighting. And do you know what? Each one is just certain that the other one is wrong. Moreover, each is certain that they have tried beyond belief to resolve their differences. And as I listen to their stories, I know that there are grains of truth in each one's version. Whatever is next for my children, I hope my girls eventually learn that getting along is a choice, and compromise is an art that we continue to practice throughout life.

Seemingly irreconcilable conflict must be a part of the human condition. There certainly is a lot of it going around right now. Why is it that so many people are poor at working positively to deal with their differences? Why is there the need to dramatize one's position, and to do so little listening when we come together at the bargaining table? Why do we emphasize our differences, rather than that which brings us together? And why is there this tendency to forget just how blessed we are in our lives, as we focus on the challenges?

During the government shutdown, I spent my time catching up on farm chores and various things that need doing around the house. I tried to help others, and make a difference in their lives. With the exception of a whopping big repair bill for my car, I kept my spending down, it not being clear just exactly how long this might go on, and what would be the impact to my finances. As the shutdown ended, my sister advised me to save up some money, because we may have the chance to do this a couple more times yet this fiscal year.

Be that as it may, during my time off I found myself being reminded time and again, just how fortunate I am to have the job that I have. It has been 17 years since the last time I had a break in pay, and the same cannot be said for many of my friends and family. I have been blessed with a job that not only am I passionate about, but that I can mostly count on.

On days when I needed something really special, I went for a walk on the Chippewa National Forest, where fall has been quite lovely. There it is I looked for patience, and for grace.

We could all use a good measure of grace, to hear what is in another's heart, and give credence to their concerns... to treat others as we would be treated... to let go words said in anger, and give up that which is beneath us. May we find ways to help others with their burdens. May we come to understand that none of us really wins when another loses. May we remember that life goes better when we hold hands.

I am sure I speak for many other of the furloughed Forest Service employees when I say that I sure am glad to resume working towards our mission: caring for the land, and serving the people.

by Kelly Barrett, Wildlife Biologist
Chippewa National Forest

